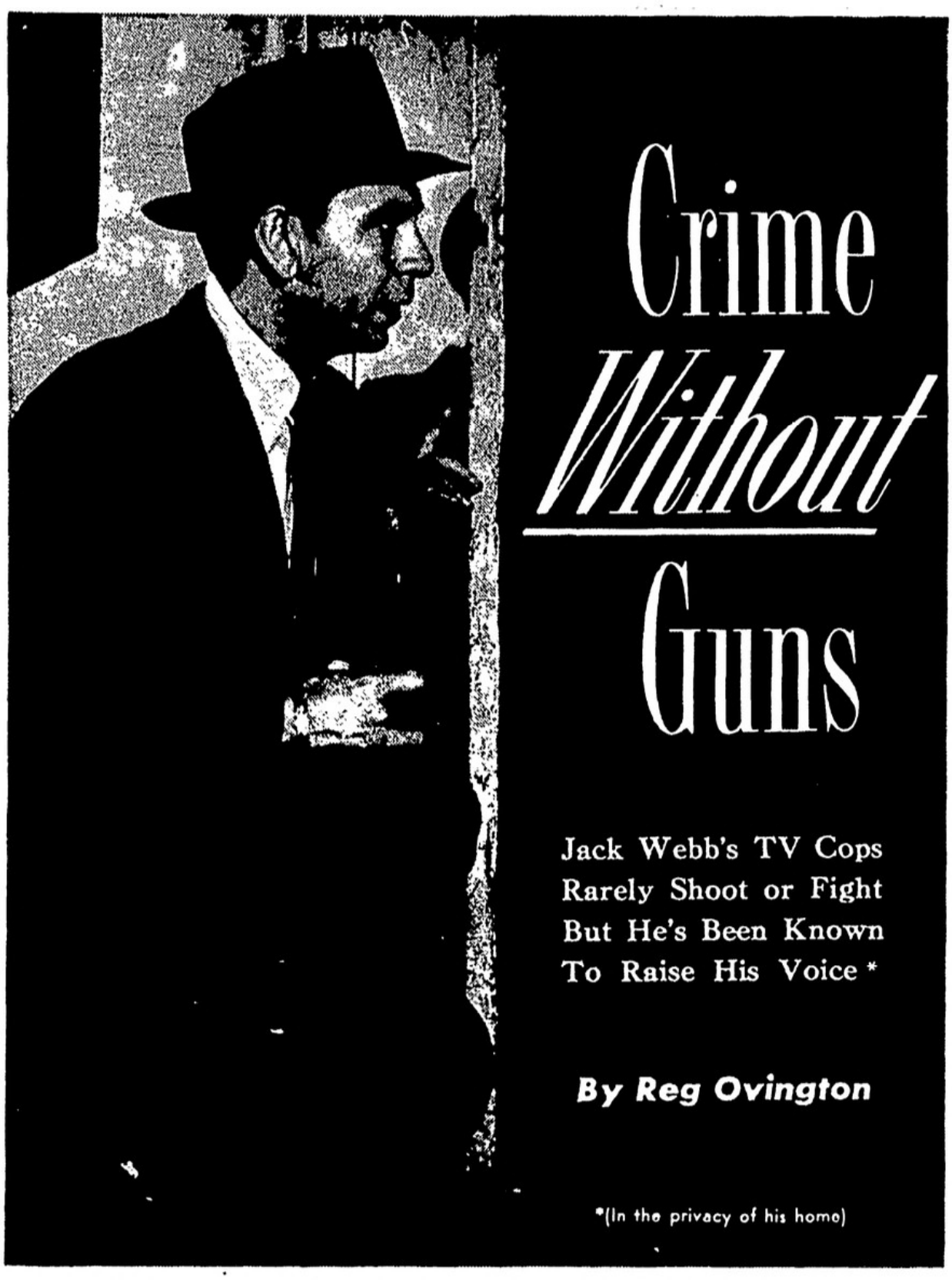


**COPS USE GUNS sparingly, Jack Webb learned by research, which is why this is one of the few occasions he has used a gun on his TV *Dragnet* show.**

SINCE its inception in January of last year, *Dragnet*, the NBC cops-and-robbers television show, has been dedicated to the principle that a policeman's life is much less exciting than the average big city bus driver's.

The cops on this show, unlike all other fictional public and private eyes ever invented, do not shout at their adversaries or at each other; they do not go about their jobs with an accompaniment of a deafening orchestra of pistol shots, and they do not leave a trail of gore behind them.

These cops do their work of enforcing the law in a quiet, methodical manner which is not far removed from plodding, their tone of voice is rarely, if ever, raised above a monotone which is not very far removed from monotony, and they shun the violence and gunplay so commonplace on all other crime shows—unless they are forced by crude evildoers to use force or weapons to protect themselves or the law from fractures.

In the more than 60 episodes so far filmed, only 15 bullets have been fired—by both the cops and the crocks—and only six punches were thrown by both sides in only three fist fights.

The comparative sedateness of this show was not, of course, achieved by accident, but rather by studied and strenuous efforts. Jack Webb, the young creator, director and star of *Dragnet*, who has had occasion to study policemen at work, is convinced that his conception of a cop's life is a realistic one. Among the many persons who feel impelled each week to write letters to him, there are, generally, about 20 correspondents currently or previously employed by police departments in cities scattered around the country. And each week, among these letters, which are almost invariably laudatory, Webb finds a smaller, but no less impressive, number written by men currently or previously in residence in some place of detention.

Most of the persons whose TV-watching habits have built and kept *Dragnet* high among the first ten programs are, of course, plain average citizens who are neither cops nor crooks. The citizens, however, seem to like the show for the very same reasons which make it so appealing to the knowledgeable men who are on opposite sides of the law.

Webb and his writers make a great fetish of realism on the show. If, in the course of its unfolding, it seems logical that Detective Joe Friday—played by Webb—should make six or seven telephone calls to check on a fact, he will make all those telephone calls. The calm, matter-of-fact tones with which Detective Friday and his partner, Sgt. Frank Smith—played by veteran actor Ben Alexander—meet almost every contingency, including the rare instances of violence, are a trademark of the show. Webb and Alexander have become so accustomed to this subdued conversational style they now speak the same way off-camera, and no longer object to having it called a monotone.

"I have been known," says Jack Webb drily, "to raise my voice on occasion, at home, my wife says."

Webb and his wife, former actress Julie London, have two daughters, Stacey, 3½, and infant Lisa. Stacey's favorite program is *Time for Beany*.

Each of the *Dragnet* episodes is based, broadly, on an actual police case taken from the files of the Los Angeles Police Department. When Webb and his writers choose a subject for filming, they discuss it with a member of the police department who is familiar with the case. After the script is checked by the City Attorney's office for technical or legal flaws, a detective of whatever squad—homicide, narcotics or robbery—is assigned to Webb to assist in the filming of the story. The cops assigned to *Dragnet* help with such details as advice on how a cop would normally put handcuffs on a prisoner, how he would talk to a superior officer, and how he would make a telephone call.

The realism extends even to the furnishings of Sgt. Friday's squad room. The office is an exact replica of a detective squad room at the Central Division of the Los Angeles Police Department, with even the identical numbers on the telephone.

Webb, who was brought up in a run-down section of Los Angeles, says he was fortunate not to have contact with policemen as a youth. Now 33, he was an Air Corps pilot in World War Two. After his discharge, he went to San Francisco where he worked in radio, beginning "by sweeping floors." His first opportunity as an actor came when he originated *Pat Novak for Hire*, a private-eye program in which he played the title role. It was when he played in a movie called *He Walked by Night* that he got his idea for *Dragnet*.

"A cop's work is not very often violent," says Webb, "and if we put too much violent action into the episodes we wouldn't be realistic. Of course we don't go so far with realism as to call a body a 'stiff,' or use other terms which might offend, but otherwise, we try to tell the truth about police work. Why, we've even had cases where cops went bad, and the police department approved, because we showed that although an individual cop might turn crook, the overwhelming majority were good, hard-working, sincere men.

"And the realism doesn't go so far that we forget that primarily we are supposed to entertain the viewers."

**AUTHENTIC POLICE procedure on *Dragnet* is guided by experts like Sgt. Stahl, left, L. A. Police Department fingerprint expert, who helps Jack Webb.**

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